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SUBJECT: IRANIAN NGO LEADER CLAIMS OPPOSITION CANNOT BACK  
DOWN NOW

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Andrew R. Young for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: Iranian NGO Leader Amir Hossein Barmaki (please protect) told poloff June 22 in Paris that if the Iranian opposition leaders back down now they will be "destroyed" by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamene'i. "They are not going to stop fighting," he insisted, "or they will be arrested or killed." Despite the apparent lull in street protests, Barmaki said, opposition leaders are fighting for their lives behind the scenes. In addition to calling for a general strike on June 24, he argued, Moussavi's next logical step is to work assiduously to build support among clerical leaders and key political leaders. Together with Rafsanjani, they need to determine "how many partners and how much power" they have accumulated. Claiming that the regime is now "cracked and divided," Barmaki noted that the opposition now includes two ex-Presidents (Khatami and Rafsanjani), one ex-Prime Minister (Moussavi), one former Speaker of the Parliament (Karroubi), two Grand Ayatollahs (Montazeri and Sanei), one former commander of the IRGC (Rezai), and many other leaders who support but have not publicly endorsed the opposition. Reflecting on President Obama's impact on the elections, Barmaki said the President had inspired Moussavi's supporters, who no longer believed the hard-line claim that an attack from America could be imminent. In addition, Barmaki suggested that future USG public statements focus on the protection of the right to protest peacefully afforded by the Iranian Constitution and Iran's international treaty obligations, and he reported a generally overlooked element of election fraud: the failure to take into account the votes of expatriate Iranians before announcing the results. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Amir Hossein Barmaki is a trusted contact of the London Iran Watcher. After rising through the ranks in the UNESCO office in Teheran, Barmaki became their director of public relations. He then launched a non-governmental organization called the "Center for Development of Sustainable Peace" focused on human rights and institutional capacity-building. In addition, he served this spring as Coordinator of Mir-Hussein Moussavi's presidential campaign in Canada. Barmaki lived in Iran until March of this year, when he moved to Toronto in order to meet the residency requirements for Canadian citizenship. In May, he returned to Iran and then left the country approximately two weeks before the elections, on May 29. He claims to have maintained very close contact with his family, friends and professional associates throughout Iran. He speaks excellent English. END NOTE.

13. (S) Barmaki told poloff June 22 that if the Iranian opposition leaders back down now they will be "destroyed" by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamene'i. He claimed

that the opposition has "everything to lose" if they stop protesting the election results; there is no longer "a road for reconciliation." They perceive the arrest by security forces of the daughter of Rafsanjani as a threat to them. "They are not going to stop fighting," he insisted, "or they will be arrested or killed." Despite the apparent lull in street protests, Barmaki said, opposition leaders are fighting for their lives behind the scenes.

#### Moussavi's Next Step

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¶4. (S) In addition to calling for a general strike on June 24, Barmaki said, Moussavi's next logical step is to work assiduously behind the scenes to build support among clerical leaders and key political leaders. Together with Rafsanjani, they need to determine "how many partners and how much power" they have accumulated. They must also decide "to what extent we (their supporters) are ready to sacrifice ourselves in order to change the regime." Rafsanjani himself, Barmaki explained, is in Qom speaking to the Experts Council to see how many members he can persuade "to question the Supreme Leader and possibly impeach him." Moussavi, Barmaki surmised, is waiting to learn the results of Rafsanjani's efforts.

#### Irreparable "cracks and divisions"

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¶5. (C) The regime is now "cracked and divided," Barmaki claimed. How can the Supreme Leader maintain unity, he asked, in the face of such public and high-level opposition

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from within the regime establishment? He noted that the opposition now includes two ex-Presidents (Khatami and Rafsanjani), one ex-Prime Minister (Moussavi), one former Speaker of the Parliament (Karroubi), two Grand Ayatollahs (Montazeri and Sanei), one former commander of the IRGC (Rezai), and many others who have not publicly endorsed them.

Thus all does not depend on Moussavi. If he leaves the scene now, Barmaki argued, an alternative leader could come and take over for him. "He has prepared the ground for them." At the same time, Barmaki expressed outrage at the "hundreds" of prominent political figures and government officials currently under arrest. In addition, he said, his contacts suspect that security forces and militias have arrested approximately 3,000 other supporters of opposition candidates, and injured or killed many others. He repeated claims in the press that dozens or perhaps hundreds of protesters have been killed. Many protesters taken to hospitals, he said, have disappeared, especially those sent to military hospitals.

#### The regime has lost support and credibility

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¶6. (S) Barmaki argued that support for the regime has dwindled over the course of many years and now "they have less support than anyone thinks." If Ahmadinejad won so many millions of votes, why don't his supporters fill the streets spontaneously?, Barmaki asked. Why do they need to be bused in? Furthermore, he said that the regular police are not willing or able to confront massive protests. They have not attacked protestors and have ignored commands to do so: "If the police supports the regime, why does it need the help of militias?" The Basij ("thugs and gangsters") and plain-clothes agents have used every weapon imaginable ("guns, sticks, swords, razors"), but the ordinary Iranian police do not support a violent crackdown. Nor do many people who voted for Ahmadinejad, Barmaki insisted: "Many have seen the shootings and the violence and said to themselves, 'I didn't vote for this.'" His family and friends report that some who voted for Ahmadinejad have even apologized for their choice. They are not fully devoted to the president or the regime, Barmaki said. The number of

true ideological followers is very small, he claimed, "and this is why they need to shoot the protesters." In fact, the regime's support has dwindled so significantly that "we are now dealing with a cult, like a mafia who profits from the sale of oil and drugs to support terrorists in Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine."

¶17. (S) Referring to the largest Iranian expatriate protest gathering in Europe, which took place outside Paris over the weekend, he said that the regime in Teheran has succeeded in "uniting the Iranian opposition" like never before. Formerly feuding members of the expatriate community have begun coming together, he reported, and cited the Paris meeting as an example. (NOTE: He did not attend the event. END NOTE.)

¶18. (S) Moreover, Barmaki argued, the Supreme Leader has "lost all credibility." He has moved the country "from a semi-authoritarian regime to fascism." "How can he have religious authority when he tells his security forces to shoot Muslims in the streets?" In addition, Ahmadinejad's constituency, primarily among the poor and uneducated, "doesn't understand what the Holocaust is. How could they? Why would they care? Ideologically, Ahmadinejad himself never had popular support." Barmaki claimed that Ahmadinejad makes controversial statements in order to distract international audiences from his domestic failures.

#### Impact of President Obama on the elections

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¶19. (S) President Obama and his Cairo speech in particular, Barmaki noted, inspired Moussavi's supporters. "It calmed the people," he explained. They no longer believed the hard-line claim that an attack from America could be imminent, according to Barmaki; they no longer voted from fear, he said. More people have begun to think "it's a fake enemy." He surmised that "Obama still has the upper hand. Khamene'i is smart, but he's losing."

#### Suggestions for US position on the elections

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¶110. (S) As to the US stance toward the elections, Barmaki said it is imperative that America condemn the violence and human rights violations and that the USG refuse to grant

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Ahmadinejad legitimacy. He suggested that future USG statements focus on the protection of the right to protest peacefully afforded by the Iranian Constitution and Iran's international treaty obligations. He urged the USG to pursue travel bans on key leaders and ministers. He said the USG message must be: "We know who you are: you are violent, but you are not true representatives of the Iranian people. You will not be a fully respected member of the international community until you change your behavior toward your own people." He stressed that the worst step we could take would be to come out in favor of one group or another. This move would strengthen the hardliners, he said.

#### Additional evidence of fraud: expatriate vote not counted

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¶111. (S) As further evidence of election fraud, Barmaki cited the fact that expatriate votes did not count in this election. Having worked as an election official in Iran, he said, he knows that it takes at least three days to tally the votes of those who cast their ballots in Iranian Embassies. This year the turn-out among expatriate Iranians "broke all records," Barmaki claimed. Evidently in this election, he said, with the result announced hours after polls closed in Iran, the regime in Teheran did not take expatriate votes into account when determining the outcome of the election.

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